

Message Text

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USDEL MBFR VIENNA PRIORITY

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USNMR SHAPE

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TAGS: PARM, NATO, MBFR

SUBJECT: FINANCIAL TIMES REPORT ON MBFR

1. FOLLOWING ARTICLE AND EDITORIAL ON MBFR APPEARED IN
FEBRUARY 27 FINANCIAL TIMES.

2. BEGIN TEXT ARTICLE: "DESPITE MBFR DEADLOCK....
SOVIET LEADERS ARE STILL INTERESTED BY MALCOLM
RUTHERFORD IN LONDON AND PAUL LENDVAI IN VIENNA

THE TALKS ON EAST-WEST FORCE CUTS IN CENTRAL
EUROPE ARE STILL DEADLOCKED, DESPITE THE NEW WESTERN
PROPOSALS MADE ON DECEMBER 16 AND THE WARSAW PACT
COUNTER-PROPOSALS TABLED LAST WEEK.

WESTERN SOURCES HAVE NOTED WITH INTEREST THAT THE
PACT'S RESPONSE CAME SO QUICKLY, BUT ARE INCLINED TO
ATTRIBUTE THIS TO A DESIRE TO COINCIDE WITH THE 25TH
SOVIET PARTY CONGRESS. MR. LEONID BREZHNEV, THE SOVIET
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PARTY LEADER, DELIBERATELY DREW ATTENTION TO THE PACT'S

NEW OFFER IN HIS ADDRESS TO THE CONGRESS ON TUESDAY.

HIS REMARKS HAVE BEEN INTERPRETED IN THE WEST AS A SIGN THAT THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP IS STILL VERY MUCH INTERESTED IN THE FORCE CUT NEGOTIATIONS, THOUGH ALWAYS ON ITS OWN TERMS. AT THE VERY LEAST, IT IS STRIVING TO WIN THE PROPAGANDA BATTLE.

THE NEW ELEMENTS IN THE WESTERN PROPOSALS LAST DECEMBER WERE AN OFFER TO INCLUDE IN THE REDUCTIONS ABOUT 1,000 U.S. NUCLEAR WARHEADS BASED IN THE CENTRAL REGION, 54 PHANTOM AIRCRAFT AND 36 PERSHING MISSILE LAUNCHERS, AND TO AIM AT A COMMON CEILING OF GROUND AND AIR FORCE MANPOWER OF AROUND 900,000 ON EACH SIDE.

PREVIOUSLY THE WEST HAD REFUSED TO INCLUDE TACTICS

NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND HAD CALLED ONLY FOR A COMMON CEILING OF GROUND FORCES WHICH WOULD HAVE BEEN AROUND 700,000.

THE AIM OF THE COMMON CEILING WAS, AND REMAINS, CRUCIAL TO THE WESTERN POSITION. THE DEADLOCK PERSISTS LARGELY BECAUSE THIS AIM IS STILL TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE TO THE WARSAW PACT, WHICH AT PRESENT HAS SUPERIORITY OF ABOUT 150,000 GROUND FORCES AND 9,500 TANKS.

AS MR. REZHNEV POINTED OUT IN HIS SPEECH, THE NEW PACT PROPOSALS ACCEPT FOR THE FIRST TIME THE WESTERN DEMAND THAT THE FIRST PHASE OF THE REDUCTIONS IN FORCE LEVEL SHOULD BE MADE ONLY BY THE U.S. AND THE SOVIET UNION, LEAVING REDUCTIONS BY THEIR RESPECTIVE ALLIES UNTIL PHASE TWO. THEY DO NOT ACCEPT, HOWEVER, THE DEMAND THAT THE AIM OF A COMMON CEILING SHOULD BE RECORDED AS A COMMITMENT IN A PHASE ONE AGREEMENT.

THE PACT HAS ALSO PROPOSED THAT THE FIRST PHASE REDUCTIONS SHOULD BEGIN THIS YEAR AND THE REDUCTIONS BY THE NON-SUPERPOWER PARTICIPANTS IN 1977-78. AFTER THE FIRST PHASE AGREEMENT, THERE WOULD BE A COMMITMENT BY THE NON-SUPERPOWERS TO FREEZE THEIR FORCES AT CURRENT LEVELS UNTIL THE NEGOTIATION OF PHASE TWO.

THE SIZE OF THE SUPERPOWER REDUCTIONS WHICH THE PACT IS TALKING ABOUT COULD MEAN A SOVIET REDUCTION OF ABOUT 34,000 TROOPS AND A U.S. REDUCTION OF ABOUT 29,000, WHICH GOES NOWHERE NEAR MEETING THE WESTERN DEMAND FOR ASYMMETRICAL CUTS.

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AS MR. REZHNEV ALSO REVEALED, THE PACT HAS RESPONDED TO THE WESTERN OFFER TO INCLUDE TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS BY OFFERING TO INCLUDE SIMILAR SYSTEMS AND GIVEN NUMBERS, THOUGH IT HAS NOT GIVEN THE NUMBER OF WARHEADS. LIKE THE WEST, IT HAS OFFERED TO WITHDRAW 54 AIRCRAFT CAPABLE OF CARRYING NUCLEAR WEAPONS.

THIS OFFER HAS SOMEWHAT SURPRISED THE WEST, BUT TAKING THE PACKAGE AS A WHOLE THE WESTERN REACTION IS

THAT THE PACT IS STILL TRYING TO USE THE NEGOTIATIONS TO
CONTRACTUALISE ITS EXISTING SUPERIORITY. SO LONG AS THE
EAST REFUSES TO ACCEPT THE PRINCIPLE OF ASYMMETRICAL
CUTS, THE FEELING IS THAT THE DEADLOCK WILL CONTINUE.
CERTAINLY THERE WAS NO SIGN OF A BREAKTHROUGH AT THE 95TH
PLENARY SESSION WHICH TOOK PLACE YESTERDAY." END TEXT

3. BEGIN TEXT EDITORIAL:
"NO END TO THE TROOP CUT TALKS

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THE WARSAW PACT HAS RESPONDED WITH UNUSUAL SPEED
TO THE WESTERN OFFER, MADE LAST DECEMBER, TO INCLUDE
TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN THE NEGOTIATIONS ON MUTUAL
AND BALANCED FORCE REDUCTIONS (MBFR) IN CENTRAL EUROPE.
INDEED MR. LEONID BREZHNEV, THE SOVIET PARTY LEADER,

MIGHT ALMOST BE ACCUSED OF BREACHING THE PRINCIPLE OF CONFIDENTIALITY BY THE MANNER IN WHICH HE DREW ATTENTION TO THE PACT'S COUNTERPROPOSALS IN HIS ADDRESS TO THE 25TH SOVIET PARTY CONGRESS ON TUESDAY. NEVERTHELESS, THERE IS VERY LITTLE SIGN OF AN END TO THE DEADLOCK.

IRRELEVANT

THE NEGOTIATIONS ARE STILL STUCK ON THE SAME BASIC POINT AS THEY WERE WHEN THEY OPENED IN VIENNA MORE THAN TWO YEARS AGO. THE WARSAW PACT HAS ABOUT 150,000 MORE GROUND FORCES AND ABOUT 9,500 MORE TANKS IN CENTRAL UNCLASSIFIED

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EUROPE THAN HAS NATO. THE WEST INSISTS THAT THIS DISPARITY MUST BE PROGRESSIVELY ELIMINATED BY REDUCTIONS LEADING TO A COMMON CEILING FOR BOTH SIDES. THE PACT REJECTS THE FIGURES, BUT HAS NOT PRODUCED DATA OF ITS OWN. IT IS TOTALLY OPPOSED TO THE IDEA OF THE COMMON CEILING, WHICH IS THE MAINSTAY OF THE WESTERN POSITION, AND MEETS THE WESTERN DEMAND FOR ASYMMETRICAL CUTS BY CALLING FOR CUTS BY EQUAL PERCENTAGES BY BOTH SIDES. TO THE NATO ALLIES, THIS WOULD MEAN CONTRACTUALISING THE PACT'S NUMERICAL SUPERIORITY.

NOTHING THAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS HAS ESSENTIALLY CHANGED THIS. NATO HAS OFFERED TO INCLUDE TACTICAL WEAPONS, WHICH IT PREVIOUSLY ARGUED WERE OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF THE MBFR NEGOTIATIONS, BUT IT IS NOT A GREAT SACRIFICE SINCE THIS IS AN AREA WHERE NATO IS SUPERIOR. THE PACT HAS RESPONDED BY ACCEPTING A LONG-STANDING WESTERN DEMAND THAT THE FIRST PHASE OF THE CUTS SHOULD BE CONFINED TO SOVIET AND U.S. (AND NOT ALLIED)

NUCLEAR WEAPON CARRIERS OF ITS OWN. BUT THE NUMBERS INVOLVED IN THE RESPONSE ARE NOT LARGE - THE PROPOSED TROOP CUTS ARE NO MORE THAN 3 PER CENT - AND THERE IS STILL NO ACCEPTANCE OF THE PRINCIPLE OF THE COMMON CEILING, WITHOUT WHICH THE OFFER BECOMES IRRELEVANT FROM THE WESTERN POINT OF VIEW.

AND YET THE TALKS GO ON: NEITHER SIDE IS READY TO BREAK THEM OFF AND BOTH SIDES ARE ANXIOUS AT LEAST TO WIN THE PROPAGANDA BATTLE. THERE IS VERY LITTLE MORE THAT THE WESTERN SIDE CAN DO EXCEPT TO INSIST ON THE SAME BASIC POINT. THIS IS THAT THE WARSAW PACT HAS MORE FORCES THAN IT NEEDS IN CENTRAL EUROPE FOR A PURELY DEFENSIVE POSTURE. THIS, IN TURN, IS A CAUSE FOR CONCERN AND IF THE SOVIET UNION WANTS TO SHOW ITS GOOD FAITH, IT CAN DO SO BY ACCEPTING THE PRINCIPLE OF ASYMMETRICAL CUTS TOWARDS THE COMMON CEILING.

BERLIN

SUCH AN APPROACH HAS SOMETIMES BEEN CRITICISED,
EVEN IN THE WEST. AS BEING UNDULY HARSH, THOUGH IT IS. OF
COURSE, EASIER TO MAINTAIN AT A TIME WHEN THE SOVIET
UNION IS SO VISIBLY EXTENDING ITS ARMED STRENGTH ON A
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GLOBAL BASIS. YET IT SHOULD NOT BE DROPPED MERELY
BECAUSE THE PACT HAS SO FAR PROVED UNRECEPTIVE: THE
RUSSIANS HAVE SHOWN THEMSELVES UNYIELDING BEFORE - FOR
EXAMPLE. IN THE FOUR POWER NEGOTIATIONS ON BERLIN - ONLY
TO BECOME MORE ACCOMMODATING WHEN THEY REALISED THEY
COULD NOT SPLIT WESTERN UNITY. THE BASIC AIM IN THE
MBFR NEGOTIATIONS MUST BE MUCH THE SAME: TO CONVINCE THE
RUSSIANS THAT NATO AS A WHOLE IS UNITED IN INSISTING
THAT THE NEXT STAGE IN DETENTE MUST COME IN THE MILITARY
FIELD AND THAT THIS MEANS A REDUCTION IN THE PACT'S
NUMERICAL SUPERIORITY. NATO CAN SURVIVE WITHOUT AN
AGREEMENT: IT WOULD FIND IT MUCH MORE DIFFICULT TO
SURVIVE WITH AN AGREEMENT OF THE KIND WHICH THE PACT IS
NOW PROPOSING," END TEXT.

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